

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051
MINORITY (202) 225-5074
<https://oversight.house.gov>

February 14, 2022

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Meta Platforms, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

I am concerned by reports that stolen and fake accounts on Facebook are behind large-scale organizing and fundraising efforts related to a blockade in Canada that has impacted vital U.S.-Canada border crossings and cross-border trade.¹ These reports are particularly alarming given Facebook's history of amplifying toxic content, extremism, and disinformation, including from Russia and other foreign actors.² Although organizations representing American truckers have condemned the blockade, similar convoys are reportedly being promoted by fake Facebook accounts to occur in the United States.³

According to recent reporting, a Missouri woman's Facebook account was hacked and stolen as far back as October 2021, and hackers then used the account to create some of the largest Facebook groups organizing the blockade in Ottawa, Canada. Between January 26 and January 28, 2022, the account launched several Facebook groups that grew to include more than

¹ *U.S.-Canada Border Crossing Reopens After Six-Day Blockade by "Freedom Convoy" Protesters*, Washington Post (Feb. 13, 2022) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/13/canada-freedom-convoy-border-blockades-truckers/).

² *Facebook Wrestles with the Features It Used to Define Social Networking*, New York Times (Oct. 25, 2021) (online at www.nytimes.com/2021/10/25/technology/facebook-like-share-buttons.html); *Russian Influence Reached 126 Million Through Facebook Alone*, New York Times (Oct. 30, 2017) (online at www.nytimes.com/2017/10/30/technology/facebook-google-russia.html).

³ *American Truckers Distance from Canada Protests*, Politico (Feb. 11, 2022) (online at www.politico.com/news/2022/02/11/what-u-s-truckers-really-want-a-place-to-sleep-00008188); *As U.S. "Trucker Convoy" Picks Up Momentum, Foreign Meddling Adds to Fray*, NBC News (Feb. 11, 2022) (online at www.nbcnews.com/tech/internet/us-trucker-convoy-picks-momentum-foreign-meddling-a-dds-fray-rcna15932).

340,000 combined members and has attracted online support from far-right groups.⁴ These Facebook groups were used to raise millions of dollars in funds.⁵

While it is not clear who is behind the reported hack of the Missouri woman's account, Facebook has confirmed that fake accounts run out of overseas content mills in countries such as Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Romania have been behind content promoting the "Freedom Convoy."⁶ One Bangladeshi firm was responsible for attracting more than 170,000 members to some of the largest "Freedom Convoy" organizing groups on Facebook.⁷

Utilizing fake, stolen, or inauthentic accounts has become a common technique by those promoting disinformation campaigns and social engineering efforts, particularly foreign entities. Russia operated Facebook accounts and pages to interfere with the 2016 U.S. presidential election, including using stolen identities of Americans.⁸ These Russian-operated accounts and pages had their content shared hundreds of millions of times leading up to the election.⁹ Since 2016, Facebook has claimed to use a strategy called "remove, reduce, and inform" to manage content that violates its community standards or raises other issues.¹⁰

In response to recent concerns, Meta, Facebook's parent company, has stated that it has removed dozens of Facebook groups and pages related to the "Freedom Convoy" that were run by spammers "who used abusive tactics to mislead people about the origin and popularity of their content to drive them to off-platform websites."¹¹ However, it is unclear whether

⁴ *The Hacked Account and Suspicious Donations Behind the Canadian Trucker Protests*, Grid (Feb. 8, 2022) (online at www.grid.news/story/misinformation/2022/02/08/the-hacked-account-and-suspicious-donations-behind-the-canadian-trucker-protests/); *Canada Convoy Draws Online Support from Far-Right Activists Around the World*, New York Times (Feb. 7, 2022) (online at www.nytimes.com/2022/02/07/world/canada/canada-convoy-protests-support-far-right.html).

⁵ *The Hacked Account and Suspicious Donations Behind the Canadian Trucker Protests*, Grid (Feb. 8, 2022) (online at www.grid.news/story/misinformation/2022/02/08/the-hacked-account-and-suspicious-donations-behind-the-canadian-trucker-protests/).

⁶ *As U.S. "Trucker Convoy" Picks Up Momentum, Foreign Meddling Adds to Fray*, NBC News (Feb. 11, 2022) (online at www.nbcnews.com/tech/internet/us-trucker-convoy-picks-momentum-foreign-meddling-a-dds-fray-rca15932).

⁷ *The Canadian "Freedom Convoy" is Backed by a Bangladeshi Marketing Firm and Right-Wing Fringe Groups*, Grid (Feb. 11, 2022) (online at www.grid.news/story/misinformation/2022/02/11/the-canadian-freedom-convoy-is-backed-by-a-bangladesh-marketing-firm-and-right-wing-fringe-groups/).

⁸ Criminal Indictment (Feb. 16, 2018), *United States v. Internet Research Agency*, D.D.C. (No. 1:18 CV 00032) (online at www.justice.gov/file/1035477/download).

⁹ *Russian Propaganda May Have Been Shared Hundreds of Millions of Times, New Research Says*, Washington Post (Oct. 5, 2017) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2017/10/05/russian-propaganda-may-have-been-shared-hundreds-of-millions-of-times-new-research-says/).

¹⁰ Meta Transparency Center, *Reducing the Distribution of Problematic Content* (online at <https://transparency.fb.com/enforcement/taking-action/lowering-distribution-of-problematic-content/>) (accessed Feb. 9, 2022).

¹¹ *Meta Says It Removed Scammers' Canada Convoy Facebook Groups*, Reuters (Feb. 7, 2022) (online at www.reuters.com/technology/meta-says-it-removed-scammers-canada-convoy-facebook-groups-2022-02-08/).

inauthentic behavior related to the “Freedom Convoy” is continuing to occur on Facebook, and whether other inauthentic behavior is continuing despite Meta’s broader efforts.

To assist the Committee in its review of this matter, please respond to the following questions by February 28, 2022:

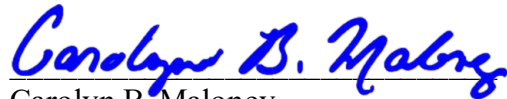
1. How many inauthentic accounts have been identified by Facebook related to the “Freedom Convoy” or connected efforts?
 - a. When and how were these accounts identified as inauthentic?
 - b. Were any of these accounts part of coordinated networks or campaigns? If so, please describe.
 - c. From which countries has Facebook identified “Freedom Convoy” content originating or amplifying?
 - d. What is the reach or influence of these accounts, including how many impressions the content originating from these accounts received? Please provide any interim or final analyses of the reach or impact of these accounts.
 - e. Where did these accounts drive traffic to?
 - f. What links were posted from these accounts?
 - g. How many advertisements were shown alongside content from these accounts, and how much revenue did Facebook earn from these advertisements?
 - h. Were advertisements purchased for “Freedom Convoy” or related terms? If so, has Facebook identified any of these purchases that originated from outside North America?
2. How many reports of compromised or hacked accounts did Facebook receive in Q4 2021? How many reports have been received in Q1 2022?
 - a. How many of these reports were escalated above an automated response?
 - b. What was the average time of response to users?
 - c. What is the average time of resolution for each reported case?
 - d. In the case of the Missouri woman’s hacked account, when did Facebook become aware of her account being compromised, and what action was taken in response?

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The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X.

An attachment to this letter provides additional instructions for responding to this request. If you have any questions, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-5051.

Sincerely,



Carolyn B. Maloney
Chairwoman

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Ranking Member